

## Historic Disability Access Article Signed

A historic victory for GEO was cemented this past Friday, March 11, as the Union and the Administration signed a tentative agreement on Disability Access. This new article is now ready to become a part of the contract.

In December, the GEO team presented a proposal for the creation of a new centralized process by which grad Employees with disabilities may request reasonable job accommodations. In February, the university bargaining team offered a counter-proposal, and the two teams worked together to develop language for the new article that would encompass the concerns of both the university and disabled graduate Employees.

Lead Negotiator Renee Echols said of the agreement, "We think that the policy we have developed provides a more fair and equitable process for graduate employees with disabilities to request and receive the accommodations they need on the job. When the new contract between U-M and GEO is signed and rati-

fied, this may be the first collective bargaining agreement to consist of an article that stipulates policies and procedures that employer and employees should follow in order to improve compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)."

In addition to a separate fund established to cover the cost of accommodations, the policy as outlined in the new contract article requires the establishment of a central office to handle accommodation requests and implementation. GEO agreed to the university's proposal to maintain an option that allows graduate employees to approach their departments informally for job accommodations without consulting the central office. With these two options available for disabled graduate Employees to pursue reasonable accommodations, it is the union's hope that the individual needs of each disabled graduate worker will be more efficiently and respectfully met. GEO will continue to work with the University as a new phase of working together to improve disability access begins.

### Both sides work to reach agreement as contract extension nears end

Productive discussions during Winter Break laid the groundwork for proposals put across the table by GEO this week on economic articles and childcare.

During Wednesday's session, GEO offered counter-proposals on salaries, benefits, and fees. These included a request for yearly raises of 3%, 3%, and 3.5% and a continued request for all fees to be waived. The benefits counter-proposals kept GEO's request for Dental II for all employees. GEO also continued to request a cap on out-of-pocket medical expenses, but raised the level of that cap slightly to \$250 per individual/\$500 per family for prescription drugs and \$250 per individual/\$500 per family for other medical expenses, such as doctor appointments.

GEO also made a counterproposal on Article 12, Childcare, that requests the creation of a separate fund to provide the childcare subsidy to parents who do not currently qualify because of the spousal work/study requirement. The idea of creating this fund as a way of expanding access to the childcare subsidy emerged during Winter Break discussions with the Administration, and GEO crafted this proposal in the spirit of cooperation to attempt to address this issue in a way that works for members as well as the University.

GEO anticipates that the University will return to the table on Wednesday with counters to these economic proposals. GEO members will then face a crucial decision at the next General Membership Meeting. On February 23, GEO members voted to extend the contract until Friday, March 18. That means that contract expiration is once again near, and members must decide whether to accept what the University has offered up to that point or commit to continuing and increasing pressure until an acceptable contract is negotiated.

<b>Contract extension ends March 18: get involved now to make sure our new contract is strong.</b>		
<b>BARGAINING</b>	<b>GMM</b>	<b>...and if that doesn't work:</b>
<p>Wednesday, March 16 1-5pm, Palmer Commons</p> <p>Admin offers on salaries, benefits, and childcare expected--this may be our last chance to press for progress.</p>	<p>Wednesday, March 16 7-9pm Michigan League Ballroom</p> <p>Either we're accepting the offers on the table OR we're deciding what to do next. Have a voice in the decision.</p>	<p>Wednesday, March 23 2:30pm RALLY on the Diag</p> <p>Save the date in case we need to take urgent action to respond to this week's negotiations.</p>

# Solidarity Update: State politics & the future of GEO

*This past week, Governor Rick Snyder signed legislation that directly threatens other locals of our parent union, the American Federation of Teachers. This update from AFT Michigan details how this legislation lays the groundwork to summarily suspend contracts bargained by teachers and other public employees. This might not affect GSIs at the University of Michigan today, but this attack on established, collectively-bargained contracts signals that we stay aware of what's going on and be prepared to take action.*

The Emergency Financial Manager (EFM) bills passed the Michigan Senate at 1:15p.m. on March 11. We have no doubt that these final three bills will pass the House. These EFM bills will allow someone appointed by the Governor to arrive in a community, strip the locally elected school board or city council of their power, throw out contracts and not be challenged by the people, the elected officials or the courts.

Governor Snyder has repeatedly said he supports collective bargaining rights, yet he will sign these bills. He also said he wanted to invest in early childhood education, but his budget offered nothing. He offers us a budget of "shared sacrifice" but cuts taxes on corporations and increases taxes on senior citizens and low income working families. We may have lost the battle over the EFM bills, but we will continue fighting because as Amal Awad-Jumah from Dearborn explained why he called his Senator - "it's our obligation." We must fight for our locals who will be pushed into financial crisis if the Governor's budget becomes a reality. We must fight for our students, for public schools and public universities. Individuals work-

ing together through their unions are the last best defense of the middle class. It cannot be the same old partisan politics as usual where the party in power tries to hurt the other side. We need balance that brings our leaders together to create a quality education system and jobs here in Michigan. Keep watching your email, our webpage at <http://aftmichigan.org/> and AFT Michigan's Facebook page to find out what our next actions will be and how you can participate.

## GEO in Action

On Friday, March 11, more than 50 GEO members participated in a Work-In in the Lobby of Mason Hall. Members then marched to bargaining.

(Photo by Ben Seese.)



## Mark your calendar!

**Come when you can, leave when you need to.  
To win a strong contract, we need you in the room.**

### This week's bargaining sessions:

**March 16:** GEO anticipates the University will present counters on economic proposals including salaries, benefits, and childcare. \*This will be the last proposal received before contract expiration on March 18.\* (Palmer Commons, Plaza Room, 3rd Floor)

**March 18:** Topics TBD (Palmer Commons, Plaza Room, 3rd Floor)

Closed captioning TBD. Bargaining runs from 1-5pm, but come at any time to make our union's presence known.

**Member Attendance Crucial: General Membership Meeting before contract expires March 18**

**Wednesday, March 16 @ the Michigan League Ballroom, 7-9pm**

At this meeting, members will likely need to decide whether or not to accept the offers currently on the table. If those offers are not acceptable, we will need to plan what to do next.

### Fast ways to get involved now!

- We want feedback! Tell us what you think about bargaining @ <http://umgeo.org/webcaucus>
- Come to bargaining! (see calendar above for times and locations)
- Friend us on Facebook: Michigan GEO & Follow us on Twitter: [geo3550](https://twitter.com/geo3550)
- Check the GEO Events Calendar @ <http://umgeo.org/events> (& subscribe via Google Calendar)
- Check out the website: [www.umgeo.org](http://www.umgeo.org) - includes RSS updates